CURLY, CUSTER INDIAN SCOUT, DENOUNCED AS ROMANCER

Justice William E. Morris, Who Was a Corporal in Seventh Cavalry, Says Indian's Story Is Fantastical

Curly, Who Says He Was Called Bloody Knife, Poses as "Only Survivor of Custer Massacre"

WILLIAM E. MORRIS, now a Justice of the Municipal Court in The Bronx, was a trooper in the Seventh United States Cavalry when George E. Custer and his command, consisting of 271 men of that regiment and some civilians and Indian scouts, were wiped out at the battle of the Little Big Horn, Mont., fought on June 25-26, 1876, against Sioux and Northern Cheyenne Indians. Justice Morris was with Major Reno's command two miles away from the scene of the battle at the time of the disaster and thus escaped the fate of his comrades. Justice Morris has a strong grievance against Curly, a Crow Indian scout.

Mr. Morris studied law and was admitted to the bar after having been honorably discharged from the army. He came to New York to live a number of years ago. In addition to holding the office of Justice he is a Captain in the Sixty-ninth regiment, National Guard of New York. He was twice wounded on the day of the battle. He was transported from the battlefield with many other soldiers of the Seventh Cavalry to Fort Keogh, where he recovered and was enabled to fight again, this time in the Nez Perce campaign.

His amazement and anger were aroused a few days ago when he read a despatch from Chicago in the New York papers reciting a tale which Curly told in that city while on his way from his home in Montana to Washington.

It should be explained that at the court of inquiry held by order of the War Department some months after the battle for the purpose of ascertaining the facts connected with the killing of nearly one-half of the Seventh Cavalry it was shown that four Crow scouts, Curly, Bull Plenty, Hairy Moccasin and Man-That-Goes-Ahead, were with Custer's column until within half an hour or less of the commencement of the actual fighting with the hostiles. Bloody Knife, a Ree scout, was with Major Reno's column.

The real Curly, whose photograph accompanies this article and whom the court of inquiry verified, is mentioned in the "Vanishing Race" by Rodman Wanamaker.

Just before the Sioux and Cheyennes attacked Custer, having first attacked Reno down the valley, the four Crow scouts, in accordance with the recognized custom which existed in the early days in the West, were permitted to leave the Custer column for the purpose of stealing ponies from the enemy, if possible; then making their way to their own camp, many miles distant.

The four Crows found the Sioux and Northern Cheyennes in such force that it was all they could do to save their own lives, which they did by making their way through the hostile lines to the Little Big Horn River, a couple of miles away, and there lying submerged 'th nothing but their noses showing ubove the water until night, when they succeeded in getting away in the darkness undiscovered by the enemy.

Curly's claim to be the sole survivor of the Custer battle has long been known in the West. At the time of the Chicago exposition a white man who had lived in Montana for many years and was designated as a squaw man, having married an Indian wife, saw an opportunity to capitalize Curly as "the only man, white or Indian, who succeeded in escaping from the Custer battlefield." He therefore took him to the exposition and put him on exhibition. Thousands of persons paid to see one who they were told had succeeded in escaping from the very jaws of death. Curly accepted with much hauteur the attention, wonder and interest which he aroused on the part of visitors.

The tale he recently told in Chicago was even more sensational and filled with a greater number of misstatements than any ever previously narrated, according to Capt. Morris. Only the more important of these were discussed by Justice Morris a few days ago. Among these are Curly's statements that he was called Bloody Knife, that the Indians never purposely killed a hostile Indian scout, that the night before the battle he entered the Sioux camp and ate with Rain-in-the-Face, a noted Sioux subchief, who in the next day's fight, as has been proved by the records, killed Capt. Tom Custer, a brother of the General, and ate his heart in the fulfilment of an oath he took when Capt. Custer arrested him at the Pine Ridge agency for the murder of a white army veterinary surgeon; that the night before the battle he was sent by Gen. Custer to summon Major Reno and Capt. Benteen to his aid, that he reached Reno, who refused to obey the order; that he then went on to Benteen, who was a short distance away with a detachment of the Seventh, and who sent a number of soldiers, under a subordinate officer, to Custer's assistance, and that all of these men died with the General.

"In the familar picture of 'Custer's Last Fight' the figure of an Indian is shown pushing his way toward Custer as he falls," said Curly. "Well, I am that Indian. I reached Custer's side and held his head as he fell back dead."

Curly declared that the artist who painted this picture should not have shown Custer and his men scalped or otherwise mutilated on the field of battle. "There was no scalping and no mutilation," he said. "Four hundred and seventy-three officers and soldiers were killed but not a mark was found on them except those made by bullets.

"I was free to come and go after the battle, just as before. I testified both at the court-martial and at the trial of Rain-in-the-Face. My testimony and the work of some high priced lawyers saved his life, but we could not save him from prison. He died in the military prison at Fort Leavenworth fourteen years later."

Curly, who has of late taken the name of Ben McIntosh, now says that his father was a Scotchman and that he was kidnapped in infancy by the confederated Comanches, Kiowas and Arapahoes. He says he did not wear a pair of trousers or eat a piece of white bread until he was 24 years old.

"In Curly we have a particularly fine specimen of the great North American romancer," said Capt. Morris in commenting on Curly's story. "His tale is so fantastical as to be almost interesting, but for the sake of history and in justice to the memory of Custer and the 271 officers, soldiers and civilians who died with him—for there were some civilians who fell there on those two days, including Charley Reynolds, the famous white scout; Mark Kellogg, the correspondent for a New York morning newspaper; Boston Custer, a relative of the General, who was not in the army, and several Indian scouts—his ridiculous tales should be checked up and shown to be the rank untruths they are.

"The fact is, the last man, white or friendly Indian, who saw Custer and his men alive as the battle began, and lived to tell the tale, was a Seventh Cavalry trumpeter, an Italian, whose name I have forgotten, who was sent by Custer's adjutant as a despatch bearer to Capt. Benteen, who was three miles or so distant with the ammunition packs, this despatch containing the words: 'Benteen, Hurry up. Bring packs. Big camp. Hurry up.'

"This man did actually succeed in evading the fast approaching hostiles and reaching Benteen, but by that time the Indians had attacked both Benteen's and Reno's columns, and to the number of thousands swarmed between those columns and that of Custer. Good reason for Reno and Benteen not going to Custer's aid: they were themselves fighting for their lives and surrounded by Indians. It was out of all human possibility for either of these columns to have reached Custer.

"By the way, the trumpeter referred to was, until a few years ago at least, a ticket chopper on the New York Ninth avenue elevated road.

"To continue about Curly: Bloody Knife, by which name he says he was known to the Indians, was a Ree Indian, and a chief. He was a scout with Major Reno's column. I saw him killed by a Northern Cheyenne in the first day's fight. He was within fifty feet of me at the time. This was soon after Chief Gall, the great war chief of the Sioux nation, and only second in authority to Sitting Bull, attacked us, together with Two Moons, the famous war chief of the Northern Cheyennes.

"At about the same time I saw Isaiah, a negro Indian interpreter from Fort Keogh, and a white contract doctor, shot and killed. Bloody Knife, by the way, was forty-five years of age at the time of his death, while Curly was then a young man.

"Incidentally, I recall that Bloody Knife came into our camp the night before the battle from a scout thirty miles up the valley of the Little Big Horn, and reported to Gen. Custer that there were 'heap Sioux' there, at the same time plucking up handfuls of grass and showing the individual blades to the General for the purpose of illustrating how thick the enemy were.

"Curly says that hostile Indians never kill an Indian scout intentionally. Precisely the contrary is the case. In the early days in the West they invariably killed Indian scouts with white troops because they regarded them as traitors to their race. The Rees and the Sioux are hereditary enemies, as the Crows and the Sioux, too, have always been. The Sioux on one side and the Crows and the Rees on the other always killed each other whenever the opportunity presented itself, irrespective of whether or not the Crows or Rees were acting as scouts for white men.

"Curly, like Yellow Face and Two-Belly-Woman, who were scouts with Reno as well as Bloody Knife, is what is known in Montana as a mountain Crow; that is, in earlier days their range was in the mountains rather than on the plains, as was the case with another branch of the Crow tribe. No one that I ever heard of ever was told until recently that Curly claimed a Scotchman as a father, or that he had been kidnapped when a child by the Comanches, Kiowas and Arapahoes, who are plain Indians. The two former tribes lived in Texas, while the Arapahoes ranged in Kansas and Colorado, hundreds of miles to the south. None of these tribes ever came as far north as Montana.

"As to what Curly says about having been sent by Gen. Custer as a messenger to Reno and Benteen with orders for them to join him up the valley, and which would have been June 24, the night before the fight, that is absolute nonsense. The fact is the entire column did not separate until well along in the morning of June 25, when Custer and his men went up one side of the valley to attack the hostiles' camp from above, while Reno and his men, with Benteen in support, and the pack train in the rear of these, again, were to strike the enemy from the lower end of the valley, thus catching the Indian camp between them.

"Custer did not become engaged with the enemy, however, until about 1 o'clock in the afternoon of June 25. He was then some two miles from Reno and Benteen, but we could tell from the heavy firing in his direction that he was desperately engaged. We heard firing in volleys, which we took to perhaps be meant as signals that Custer was heavily attacked and needed help, which we could not give him.

"If, then, the main column did not separate until the morning of June 25, how and why should Custer have sent Curly with orders to Reno and Benteen on June 24, when at that very time they and other officers were in council with him, and so close that he could have reached them by stretching forth his hands?

"Had Curly, a Crow, and an avowed enemy of the Sioux, entered their camp the night before the battle and eaten with Rain-in-the-Face, as he says he did, he would never have come out of there alive. The Sioux would have scalped him and burned him at the stake, as was their pleasant custom with enemies they especially hated.

"This Indian romancer continues his ridiculous tale by saying that General Custer killed fourteen Indians with his sabre before he fell. There was not a sabre in our entire command, nor indeed, one nearer than Fort Abraham Lincoln, some five hundred miles or thereabouts, distant, where we left them when we started on the expedition, our side arms consisted of carbines and pistols. Any Indian, as well as any white man, who is conversant with the mode of warfare between Indians and troops during the early days in the West is well aware that sabres were never used.

"As for Curly's assertion that he talked with Custer during the fight and that he held Custer's head when that officer fell back dead, shot through the heart by a Sioux, it is quite on a par with the rest of what he says.

"Again, his declaration that there was no scalping or other mutilation of the dead white men and Indian scouts by the enemy is grossly untrue. They were, nearly every one of them, scalped, although it has always been understood that Custer himself was not scalped, out of respect for his bravery, although no doubt the temptation to take his scalp was very great.

"Few of the dead on our side escaped mutilation, if any. The character of some of the forms of mutilation was too terrible to mention in print even now, after all these years, and they never have been known in detail to the American people.

"To make matters worse, the battle was fought in very hot weather. When the battle was over the Indians set fire to the dry grass, the result being that many of the soldiers' bodies were burned. This, together with the hot weather and the mutilations, left the bodies in a shocking condition.

"I was shot through the body in the first day's fight under Reno and fell from my horse. I managed to reach the top of the bluff, where our troops made a stand until the second day, when the Indians drew off on hearing from their scouts of the approach of Gen. Gibbons and Gen. Terry, whose troops consisted chiefly of infantry, or 'long guns,' as the Indians designated foot soldiers as distinguished from cavalry. The Indians raced for the Canadian line, which they hoped to cross before the American troops could overtake them, and this they succeeded in doing.

"From where I lay in what was dignified by the name of field hospital I could see the river bottom below and the side hills dotted with the bodies of our men, dead and wounded, together with a number of the enemy. I saw Sioux and Northern Cheyenne squaws come on the battlefield and kill our wounded with stone war clubs and knives and mutilate both them and the dead.

"While these terrible scenes were being enacted many of us wounded who were on top of the bluff, and so out of the Indian's reach, were being operated on by the surgeons, the tailboards, or wooden ends of wagons being used for operating tables, while we were propped up against ammunition boxes or sacks of oats.

"The facts I have given can easily be corroborated by those officers and men of the Seventh Cavalry who fought with Reno on those two memorable days, and who are still living, and there are a number of them, some of them still serving in the army.

"As for Curly, he ought to be suppressed as a professional prevaricator and a public nuisance."

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The genuine Curly—Old Custer scout.

WHEN BLACKFEET INDIANS DANCE AT THEIR SACRED FESTIVAL.—Each Year Tribe Gathers to Fulfil Vows and Pray—Grace and Beauty of the Dances and Tribal Hymns Fascinate Spectators

PICTURE to yourself a vast treeless plain with high snow capped mountains in the distance. On this level stretch of ground Indian tepees are arranged in a semicircle. Some are white, others are yellow or red or brown. At one side two tall trees are stripped of their branches. This is for the ceremonies of the medicine lodge. There is a motley crowd of Indians on foot and on horseback. Mingling with them are white men and women from the adjoining country. All are massed around a circular rope fence, inside of which the Blackfeet Indians are holding their annual festival with stories and sacred dances.

If you were in Montana last June this is what you would have witnessed when 2,000 Piegan Indians from Canada and this country held at Browning, the Indian reservation just outside of Glacier National Park, their remarkable festival. The vari-colored tepees held members of many tribes of Indians. The dances which were witnessed are old, old, so ancient that the Indian cannot tell when they started. The beaded jackets, strange feathered headdress, medicine bags and deerskin suits which Indian chiefs wear cannot be purchased for money and the strange chants are handed down from father to son.

If you press closer to the rope fence and mingle more freely with the onlookers you will see among the crowd white men in khaki suits, high boots, sombreros, and they and the white women with them have come from nearby Glacier National Park. Every one is watching the dances, which last for four or five days and which afford the Indian an opportunity to renew acquaintances and go through religious ceremonies.

Perhaps by your side is a young Indian girl on a pony with trappings of beadwork; next to her is a New York society woman, and jogging elbows with her is an old Indian squaw with blanket or beaded cape and black hair braided down her back. In her arms she holds a blinking Indian baby strapped to the back board and swathed in embroidered and beaded blankets which lace together. On the outskirts of the crowd are Indians sitting on horses to which are attached the travois for carrying burdens, for they may have come a long distance. Over all, the onlookers, the dancing chiefs, the singing and swaying Indians, the hot sun beats down.

Then suddenly the chiefs cease to chant. Several other leaders of the tribe push into the circle and begin a rhythmic song. Tomtoms are beaten, the Indian braves shout and leap, coming down always on the ground on a certain beat of the music. The Indian women, leaping to their feet, join in a circle that revolves and revolves and produces a hypnotic influence which in some cases seizes the white onlookers.

These Blackfeet Indians with their love songs, their wolf songs, Sioux celebration songs, children's game songs and tribal hymns fascinate you. Their dances, the sun dance, the grain dance, the grass dance, are among the most interesting given by the Indians. Though some of these redmen may ordinarily dress in the store clothes of the white man they are all interested enough in their tribal dances to assume their ancestral garb when the dance and song festivals occur. They look upon many of these ceremonies as having religious character expressive of their beliefs. The sun dance as given by them always has its beginning in a woman's prayer for the recovery of the sick and the whole tribe come together to fulfil vows, to fast and to pray, as well as to seek what diversion dancing affords.

The trail makers

Chief Three Bears (87 years) at council near McDermott.

The chief dancer of these Indians, who appears in the evening to dance for the guests at the Glacier Park Hotel, is Chief Fish Wolf Robe. He has many handsome costumes. Some of them are of buckskin with necklace of many strands of beads and leggins and moccasins ornamented with porcupine quills. Another chief may wear a war bonnet of feathers tipped with stained horsehair. Otter and mink skins are woven in and out and the animals' tails hang down behind. Bracelets and leggins of tanned deer skin ornamented with porcupine quills are common.

The Blackfeet Indians have from time immemorial known of a wonderful trail which runs north and south along the Rocky Mountains. According to authorities who have gained the confidence of the chiefs, no one knows how old this trail is. It is called the "Old North Trail" and is worn deep by the feet of travellers.

Though it is not used much now since railroads have come, the deep ruts still show amid weeds and mosses. This trail runs at a uniform distance from the Rockies, passes near where the city of Helena now stands and extends south as far as Mexico.

The road has been frequented by Canadian Indians as well as American redmen and it forks where Calgary stands in Canada. This Old North trail has many traditions connected with it and stories are told of expeditions of Canadian Indians who went south to the dark skinned people (Mexicans). It took twelve moons of steady travelling.

There are many legends in Glacier National Park connected with the early life of the Blackfeet tribe. One of these is associated with the beautiful Two Medicine Lakes, which are reached in half a day from Glacier station. Here is the story as told by a Blackfeet chief:

"Many years ago there was a famine in the land of the Blackfeet, which is set down by my father from 1835 to 1837. At that time the Blackfeet Indians owned everything from Hudson Bay to the Rocky Mountains, and in all that land there was no green spot except in the valley that is called Two Medicine. Even the buffalo left the country because there was no food for them and the Indians that sought refuge in the mountains found no game or anything to eat except berries.

"Then the old men of the tribe withdrew to the valley that is now called Two Medicine and built there two medicine lodges, so great was their need. They worshipped the Great Spirit and prayed to be told what they should do to be saved from the famine. And the Great Spirit heard them and directed them to send seven of their patriarchs to the Chief Mountain, where the wind god was then residing.

"They followed these directions and seven of their oldest men retired to Chief Mountain, and there surely was the wind god. He stood at the summit of the mountain and the wings extending from his shoulders spread wide over the valleys. He faced north, east, south and west and his wings quivered as he stood. The old men worshipped him and finally they dared to touch the skins he was wearing. They made their prayer to him and he listened and his wings quivered and quivered and gradually clouds began to gather over the plains and the rain fell as if a deluge. He stretched one wing wide over the plain telling them to go back there and they would find the buffalo.

"The warriors then descended to the valley and brought the good news to their people, and they found that already the buffalo had come back and the famine was broken. And ever afterward the valley was called the Valley of the Two Medicine in memory of the medicine lodges that were there erected to the Great Spirit in the time of famine."